



Data Points

CWHS

RESULTS FROM THE CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Caregiving for chronically ill or incapacitated individuals in our society is often provided by informal sources rather than organizations or institutions. The overwhelming majority of such care is provided by women, usually a family member. It is becoming more common for women to care for an ill spouse or elderly parent while raising children. This provides different challenges for women at different ages. Younger women (ages 18-44) may be raising young children, working, and providing care for aging parents. Women in middle age (ages 45-64) may find themselves in a particular bind, raising young or teenage children, pursuing careers, and caring for an aging parent or ill spouse, sometimes both. Older women (ages 65 and older), with their own health challenges, may provide care for an impaired spouse. A growing number of older women are also caring for elderly parents or grandchildren. Providing care for someone, while potentially gratifying, can strain a woman's own health and well-being.

The 1997¹ California Women's Health Survey asked women: **"During the past 12 months, not counting work duties or normal child care, have you provided frequent care to someone?"** Other questions identified the person who was given care, the reason, and length of time care was given.

Overall, 25% of the women in the survey reported being caregivers. Middle-aged

women were most likely to be caregivers (32%), followed by older women (28%) and younger women (21%).

Reasons for providing care were similar for all ages; 33% of care was for recovery from surgery or major illness, 36% of care was to handle a physical illness or disability, 6% was to handle a mental problem, 32% of both middle-aged and older women provided care for 'other reasons'.

Among caregivers, older women were more likely to provide care for a spouse (29%) than for other relatives or friends; younger women were more likely to provide care for a friend or relative other than a spouse, parent, or child (71%); and middle-aged women were more likely to provide care for a parent (41%) or for friends or family other than a parent, spouse or child (40%).

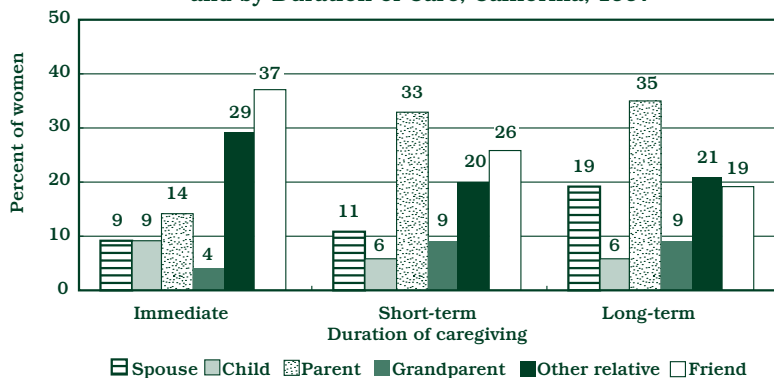
Caregiving can be immediate (less than two weeks), short term (less than a year) or long term (one or more years). Among caregivers: 23% reported providing immediate care; 33% reported providing care of short duration, for an average of 2.5 months; 44% reported providing care for a period of years (the median number of years was 4.6 among young women, 6.9 among middle-aged women, and 9.0 among older women).

CAREGIVING AMONG CALIFORNIA WOMEN, 1997¹

CMRI (California Medical Review, Inc.)

¹ Information on caregiving from the 1997 California Women's Health Survey is presented here. These questions were not analyzed for inclusion in Issue #1 of Data Points and were not repeated in the 1998 survey.

Percent of Women Providing Care by Relationship and by Duration of Care, California, 1997



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